

Chapter-3

The Kite Runner: Search for Redemption

The story of *The Kite Runner* opens with a vague reference to the winter of 1975 that changed everything in the life of Amir, the protagonist. In December 2001, Amir received a call from his friend, Rahim Khan, residing in Pakistan. His call made the narrator reminisce. Amir was the son of a rich man referred to as 'Baba.' They had one of the most beautiful houses in the northern part of Kabul. Ali was Baba's servant and Hassan was Ali's child. Baba was an influential man with a big social circle and the one who was mostly surrounded by wealthy friends at his place. Luxury dripped from every corner of that palatial home. Amir's mother died giving birth to him. Hassan, too, lost his mother (Sanaubar) after his birth, but she didn't die. She ran off with a clan of travelling dancers and singers. She was an unscrupulous woman who was nineteen years younger to Ali, her husband. She lived up to her dishonorable reputation. She was an extremely cruel lady who used to make fun of Ali's appearance. She refused to accept Hassan as her child as he, too, had a cleft lip like his father, and she fled within five days after giving birth to him. Hassan never liked talking about his mother, whereas Amir ached for his mother.

Amir talks about his childhood days and his childhood friend, Hassan. He tells us about the innocent days spent with Hassan:

When we were children, Hassan and I used to climb the poplar trees in the driveway of my father's house and annoy our neighbors by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror. We would sit across from each other on a pair of high branches, our naked feet dangling, our trouser pockets filled with dried mulberries and walnuts.

We took turns with the mirror as we ate mulberries, pelted each other with them, giggling, laughing. (3)

Hassan was a true and caring friend who always used to protect Amir. Probably, Amir never really missed his mother as Hassan filled the void. The only person who could understand Amir was Hassan. Hassan knew Amir very well. He could even hear Amir's unsaid words:

How could I be such an open book to him when, half the time, I had no idea what was milling around in his head? I was the one who went to school, the one who could read, write. I was the smart one. Hassan couldn't read a first-grade textbook but he'd read me plenty. That was a little unsettling, but also sort of comfortable to have someone who always knew what you needed. (58)

The relationship between Hassan and Amir was strong. They were fed from the same breasts: "Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir. My name." (10-11)

Amir was a pampered child. Hassan and his father took great care of him. He enjoyed the privileges and benefits that rich people enjoy. His teachers knew Baba and how rich he was. So, they avoided being harsh with him. All his faults or wrongdoings were ignored:

I remember one day, when I was eight, Ali was taking me to the bazaar to buy some naan. I was walking behind him, humming, trying to imitate his walk. I watched him swing his scraggy leg in a sweeping arc, watched his whole body tilt impossibly to the right every time he planted that foot. It seemed a minor miracle he didn't tip over with

each step. When I tried it, I almost fell into the gutter. That got me giggling. Ali turned around, caught me aping him. He didn't say anything. Not the, not ever. He just kept walking. (8)

Amir spent most of the early years of his life playing with Hassan. Hassan never went to school, while Amir did. One can say that it was more than a servant-master relationship. While Amir went to school, Hassan stayed at home helping his father, Ali, in household chores. But there is a slight mean streak in Amir. He got jealous when he found that Hassan was more intelligent and quick than him. If, at any point, Amir felt that Hassan was better than him, he snubbed him. This attitude can be seen in almost all the children. But at the same time, Amir cherished the golden moments he spent with Hassan when they were kids:

But we were kids who had learned to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that either. I spent most of the first twelve years of my life playing with Hassan. Sometimes, my entire childhood seems like one long lazy summer day with Hassan, chasing each other between tangles of trees in my father's yard, playing hide-and-seek, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, insect torture-with our crowning achievement undeniably the time we plucked the stinger off a bee and tied a string around the poor thing to yank it back every time it took flight. (24)

One night, while looking through his father's stuff, Amir laid his hands on a history book written by an Iranian, Khorami. Through the world of books, he got familiarized with the rivalry between Shia's (the Hazaras) and Sunni Muslims (Pashtuns), and how the Hazaras were prosecuted and ill-treated for ages by the Pashtuns:

Then one day, I was in Baba's study, looking through his stuff, when I found one of my mother's old history books. It was written by an Iranian named Khorami. I blew the dust off it, sneaked it into bed with me that night, and was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history. An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a. The book said a lot of things I didn't know, things my teachers hadn't mentioned. Things baba hadn't mentioned either. It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan. (8-9)

Amir's father, Baba, was a successful businessman. Because of his sheer hard work, he became one of the richest merchants in Kabul. Both Baba and Rahim Khan built a successful carpet-exporting business, two pharmacies, and a restaurant. Baba was at the peak of his career and his life was definitely a bed of roses. He even married one of Kabul's most respected and beautiful ladies, Sofia Akrami, who was a descendant of the royal family. His charismatic personality stupefied Amir's mind. He was kind-hearted and charitable. He had personally funded the entire project to build an orphanage. He paid for the entire construction of the orphanage himself.

Though we see that Baba is not the usual doting father, he is not completely indifferent either. He didn't spend much time with Amir as he was mostly engrossed in his work, but he took Amir for an outing once in a while. Amir had a child-like innocence who loved his father for all the good qualities. He was proud of him and lucky to have him as his father:

Outside the orphanage, the next day, they ran out of chairs. A lot of people had to stand to watch the opening ceremony. It was a windy day, and I sat behind Baba on the little podium just outside the main entrance of the new building. Baba was wearing a green suit and a caracul hat. Midway through the speech, the wind knocked his hat off and everyone laughed. He motioned to me to hold his hat for him and I was glad to, because then everyone would see that he was my father, my Baba. He turned back to the microphone and said he hoped the building was sturdier than his hat, and everyone laughed again. When Baba ended his speech, people stood up and cheered. They clapped for a long time. Afterward, people shook his hand. Some of them tousled my hair and shook my hand too. I was so proud of Baba, of us. (14)

Amir had also referred to a flaw in Baba's personality. Baba always saw things in black and white: "With me as the glaring exception, my father molded the world around him to his liking. The problem, of course, was that Baba saw the world in black and white. And he got to decide what was black and what was white. You can't love a person who lives that way without fearing him too. May be even hating him a little." (15)

Amir craved for Baba. Like any other child, he longed to spend time with his father:

I remember all the time he didn't come home until after dark, all the times I ate dinner alone. I'd ask Ali where Baba was, when he was coming home, though I knew full well he was at the construction site, overlooking this, supervising that. Didn't that take patience? I already hated all the kids he was building the orphanage for; sometimes I wished they'd all died along with their parents. (17)

Baba's aloofness and indifference towards Amir ignited the flame of literature in him. Amir found solace in poetry and his dead mother's books: "That was how I escaped my father's aloofness, in my dead mother's books. That and Hassan, of course. I read everything, Rumi, Hafez, Saadi, Victor Hugo, Jules Verne, Mark Twain, Ian Fleming." (19)

One day, Hassan gave a favorable response to the plot of the story fabricated by Amir. Amir made up his own story and narrated to Hassan, pretending all the while as if he was reading from the book itself. On being asked if he liked the story, Hassan said that it was the best story he had heard in a long time. Such an unbelievable response fascinated Amir and he was spellbound. That was the day when Amir discovered that he, too, could write stories: "That same night, I wrote my first short story. It took me thirty minutes. It was a dark little tale about a man who found a magic cup and learned that if he wept into the cup, his tears turned into pearls." (29)

Rahim Khan also encouraged Amir to pursue writing and showered him with compliments. In a note addressed to Amir, he wrote:

I enjoyed your story very much. Mashallah, God has granted you a special talent. It is now your duty to hone that talent, because a person who wastes his God-given talents is a donkey. You have written your

story with sound grammar and interesting style. But the most impressive thing about your story is that it has irony. You may not even know what that word means. But you will someday. It is something that some writers reach for their entire careers and never attain. You have achieved it with your first story. My door is and always will be open to you, Amir Jan. I shall hear any story you have to tell. Bravo. (31)

The positive response from Rahim reinforced Amir to write stories, but Amir was disappointed when Baba showed no interest in listening to his stories. In the novel, it is found that only Rahim Khan, and not Baba, always motivated Amir and displayed his affection. Just after this episode, Amir started despising his father: “Most days I worshipped Baba with an intensity approaching the religious. But right then, I wished I could open my veins and drain his cursed blood from my body.” (30)

Amir was so fond of reading that he didn't even hesitate to spend pocket money on the books. Baba wanted his son Amir to be a sportsman. He wanted him to be a “real” man who didn't bury his face in books all the time:

Of course, marrying a poet was one thing, but fathering a son who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting...well, that wasn't how Baba had envisioned it, I suppose. Real men didn't write poetry- and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men-real boys-played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young. Now that was something to be passionate about. (19)

Baba was a die-hard Soccer fan, but Amir hadn't inherited a shred of his athletic talents. Finally, Baba accepted the hard reality that Amir was never going to either play or watch Soccer. No matter how hard Amir tried, he just could not live up

to the expectations of his father. Baba wanted to make Amir what he was not. Baba shared about his worries to Rahim Khan. Baba was extremely anxious and worried to see Amir turn into a delicate lamb:

I heard the leather of Baba's seat creaking as he shifted on it. I closed my eyes, pressed my ear even harder against the door, wanting to hear, not wanting to hear. 'Sometimes I look out this window and I see him playing on the street with the neighborhood boys. I see how they push him around, take his toys from him, give him a shove here, a whack there. And, you know, he never fights back. Never. He just...drops his head and...'

'So he's not violent,' Rahim Khan said.

'That's not what I mean, Rahim, and you know it,' Baba shot back.

'There is something missing in that boy.' (21)

At a young age, Amir was taught about the Islam by a Mullah, so that he could grow up to be a believing, practicing Muslim:

When I was in fifth grade, we had a mullah who taught us about Islam. His name was Mullah Fatiullah Khan, a short, stubby man with a face full of acne scars and a gruff voice. He lectured us about the virtues of zakat and the duty of hadj; he taught us the intricacies of performing the five daily namaz prayers, and made us memorize verses from the Koran and though he never translated the words for us, he did stress, sometimes with the help of a stripped willow branch, that we had to pronounce the Arabic words correctly so God would hear us better.

(15)

Amir had a curious bent of mind. He loved delving deep into things, especially those concerning religion. Another characteristic of Amir was that he always became jealous when Baba gave more attention to other kids, especially Hassan:

I remember the day before the orphanage opened, Baba took me to Ghargha Lake, a few miles north of Kabul. He asked me to fetch Hassan too, but I lied and told him Hassan had the runs. I wanted Baba all to myself. And besides, one time at Ghargha Lake, Hassan and I were skimming stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed was five. Baba was there, watching, and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder. (13)

Though Hassan was a servant, he was never treated like one, at least in the matters of love and care. He was lucky to have a master like Baba who showered all his love on him. He received gifts on his birthdays every year from Baba. In the year 1974, Hassan got the birthday present which he never expected. Baba arranged for a plastic surgeon to treat Hassan's cleft lip. Amir hated Baba for being so kind and considerate towards Hassan: "I wished I too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba's sympathy. It wasn't fair. Hassan hadn't done anything to earn Baba's affections; he'd just been born with that stupid harelip." (43)

Time and again, the readers are reminded of the distance between Baba and Amir on an emotional level. Baba never discriminated between the two kids, which Amir didn't like. Amir wanted to be treated in a special way: "Baba would buy us each three identical kites and spools of glass string. If I changed my mind and asked for a bigger and fancier kite, Baba would buy it for me-but then he'd buy it for

Hassan too. Sometimes I wished he wouldn't do that. Wished he'd let me be the favorite." (48)

At times, it appears that the relation between Amir and Hassan is very strange. Amir is a complex character who displays the gamut of emotions. Amir hates, loves, envies, cares, dominates, and also makes fun of Hassan.

Ali's parents were killed in a road accident when he was just five. Baba's father adopted him into his own household. Ali and Baba grew up together as childhood playmates just like Hassan and Amir, but neither Baba nor Amir referred to Ali and Hassan as their friends. Here, we notice a striking reference to the discrimination on the basis of caste and religion and this type of religious intolerance can be seen in almost all parts of the world. Amir and Baba represent that sect of the society which is fanatic:

The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense, anyhow. Never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to build a fully functional homemade camera out of a card-board box. Never mind that we spent entire winters flying kites, running kites. Never mind that to me, the face of Afghanistan is that of a boy with a thin-boned frame, a shaved head, and low-set ears, a boy with a Chinese doll face perpetually lit by a hair-lipped smile.

Never mind any of those things. Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing. (24)

The readers are brought face-to-face with war-torn Afghanistan. For the first time, gunshots could be heard in the streets, which frightened Hassan and Amir. It marked the beginning of a new era, an era of bloodletting. After a long time, Amir could see the signs of worry and tension on Baba's face. At this point, the readers are introduced to Assef, Wali, and Kamal. Assef, Mahmood's (Baba's friend) son, was a rich spoiled brat. He was a sociopath, a person with an anti-social personality disorder exhibiting arrogant and inhuman behavior. He abhorred Hassan for his being a Hazara. Here, we see that even in kids or youngsters, there is a strong sense of religious intolerance. They, too, believe in the caste system. Just as there is an evident communal tension between Hindus and Muslims (especially in India), there is also an animosity between Pashtuns and Hazaras. Assef hated Amir for the sole reason that he loved Hassan as a friend.

In the next part of the novel, there is a reference to a kite-fighting tournament held during winters in Kabul. It had its own importance for the people. Fighting kites was like going to war. This tournament was the highlight of the winter season which was a fun-filled event for both the kite fighters and kite runners, who chased the windblown kites. For kite runners, the most coveted prize was the last fallen kite of the tournament. In order to live up to the expectations of his father, Amir was extremely desperate to participate in the tournament and emerge as a winner. He still longed for his father's love and care. Amir was determined to win the tournament just to make his father happy and proud:

Baba smoked his pipe and talked. I pretended to listen. But I couldn't listen, not really, because Baba's casual little comment had planted a seed in my head: the resolution that I would win that winter's tournament. I was going to win. There was no other viable option. I

was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. (52)

The big day arrived. All the preparations were made for the kite-fighting tournament. Amir hesitated to participate in the tournament because his father had expectations from him. Here, we see that fathers who are strict and reserved make their children feel restrained. Children, whose parents are strict and cold, feel pressurized to perform better, because their parents' disappointment hurt them: "Suddenly, I wanted to withdraw. Pack it all in, go back home. What was I thinking? Why was I putting myself through this, when I already knew the outcome? Baba on the roof, watching me. I felt his glare on me like the heat of a blistering sun. This would be failure on a grand scale, even for me." (58)

For Amir, this tournament became more than just a competition. For him, the victory would not be just mere victory. It would mean salvation and redemption. It was, as if, the only chance left for Amir to establish his identity:

But all I heard—all I willed myself to hear—was the thudding of blood in my head. All I saw was the blue kite. All I smelled was victory. Salvation. Redemption. If Baba was wrong and there was a God like they said in school, then He'd let me win. I didn't know what the other guy was playing for, maybe just bragging rights. But this was my one chance to become someone who was looked at, not seen, listened to, not heard. If there was a God, He'd guide the winds, let them blow for me so that, with a tug of my string, I'd cut lose my pain, my longing. I'd endured too much, come too far. And suddenly, just like that hope

became knowledge. I was going to win. It was just a matter of when.

(61-62)

Finally, Amir emerged as a victor, who won the tournament with flying colors. For Amir, winning this tournament was the greatest moment of his life. At last, he made his father proud. This was the moment he was waiting for when, finally, his worthiness would be acknowledged. Just as Amir was an excellent kite-fighter, Hassan was a brilliant kite-runner. When Amir went out in search of Hassan, who had gone to chase the last kite of the tournament, he saw that Hassan was captured by the three hooligans, Assef, Wali, and Kamal. Assef got the golden opportunity to take revenge on Amir and Hassan. Hassan was all alone with these three boys. Assef decided to forgive Hassan for his folly only on one condition that Assef would take that last blue kite from him, but Hassan refused as it belonged to Amir. This shows the loyalty of a servant:

‘You’re a lucky Hazara,’ Assef said, taking a step toward Hassan.

‘Because today, it’s only going to cost you that blue kite. A fair deal, boys, isn’t it?’

‘More than fair,’ Kamal said.

Even from where I was standing, I could see the fear creeping into Hassan’s eyes, but he shook his head. ‘Amir Agha won the tournament and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite.’

‘A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog,’ Assef said. (68)

Even after being instigated and abused, Hassan did not return the blue kite. Though Hassan knew that his life was in danger, he still chose to be a loyal servant. All the while, Amir was watching all this from a distance, but he did not have the courage to save Hassan from the clutches of Assef and his friends. Assef was

successful in sexually exploiting Hassan. There was nothing much that Hassan could do about it as he was all alone, and Amir was hiding and watching all this like a coward. Hassan had to surrender:

Assef knelt behind Hassan, put his hands on Hassan's hips and lifted his bare buttocks. He kept one hand on Hassan's back and undid his own belt buckle with his free hand. He unzipped his jeans. Dropped his underwear. He positioned himself behind Hassan. Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb. (71)

Amir could have intervened, but he was not really strong at heart. There were things which made him go weak in the knees though he was not a cruel boy. The religious custom of sacrificing a sheep every year to celebrate Eid sent shivers down his spine. It haunted Amir for a long time: "I don't know why I watch this yearly ritual in our backyard; my nightmares persist long after the bloodstains on the grass have faded. But I always watch. I watch because of that look of acceptance in the animal's eyes. Absurdly, I imagine the animal understands. I imagine the animal sees that its imminent demise is for a higher purpose. This is the look...." (72)

Here, there is a symbolic significance in the sacrificing of a sheep. Here, the sheep can be compared to Hassan, who is innocent. Just as there is a look of acceptance in an animal's eyes, there is also a look of acceptance in the eyes of Hassan. Amir's conscience tickled a bit. Oscillating between the desire to help or run, he finally decided to flee the scene like a coward. Amir could not stand up for Hassan, the way Hassan did:

I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (72-73)

When Hassan encountered Amir after this horrible incident, he didn't tell anything. Even after all the suffering, Hassan had that blue kite in his hands. This incident is heart-breaking. Amir behaved as if he had not seen anything and appeared clueless about the horrific incident. He appeared as a coward, selfish, mean, thick-skinned, cold-blooded, and heartless person who has no sense of gratitude. After that horrible incident, Hassan showed no enthusiasm and lost all the interest in life. He did his chores and slept all day and didn't talk to anyone, not even to Amir. Ali was not able to make out what was wrong with Hassan. On being asked, Amir snubbed Ali as he didn't want to disclose the facts to anyone. Ali knew that something was wrong, but not exactly.

On the other hand, Baba hugged Amir for winning the tournament. This was the moment Amir had been waiting for. Baba's acceptance and approval was all that mattered to Amir. Baba agreed to everything Amir asked for after he won the tournament. He even told the other relatives how proud he was of Amir for winning the tournament. Baba could not get over that feeling. The feeling, that his son had won the tournament, had still not sunk in. Things changed for the better after Amir's

victory in the kite tournament, but no one knew whether this change was temporary or permanent. One could see a considerable difference in the relationship between Amir and Baba:

My memory of the rest of that winter of 1975 is pretty hazy. I remember I was fairly happy when Baba was home. We'd eat together, go to see a film, visit Kaka Homayoun or Kaka Faruq. Sometimes Rahim Khan came over and Baba let me sit in his study and sip tea with them. He'd even have me read him some of my stories. It was good and I even believed it would last. And Baba believed it too, I think. We both should have known better. For at least a few months after the kite tournament, Baba and I immersed ourselves in a sweet illusion, saw each other in a way that we never had before. We'd actually deceived ourselves into thinking that a toy made of tissue paper, glue, and bamboo could somehow close the chasm between us. (81-82)

Long after that incident was over, Amir was haunted by the thoughts of that day. The thoughts kept haunting him. He got what he wanted all these years, still he was feeling incomplete:

It shouldn't have felt this way. Baba and I were finally friends. We'd gone to the zoo a few days before, seen Marjan the lion, and I had hurled a pebble at the bear when no one was watching. We'd gone to Dadkhoda's Kabob House afterward, across from Cinema Park, had lamb kabob with freshly baked naan from the tandoor. Baba told me stories of his travels to India and Russia, the people he had met, like the armless, legless couple in Bombay who'd been married forty-seven

years and raised eleven children. That should have been fun, spending a day like that with Baba, hearing his stories. I finally had what I'd wanted all those years. Except now that I had it, I felt as empty as this unkempt pool I was dangling my legs into. (79-80)

Images of Hassan getting raped kept haunting Amir in his dreams:

'I watched Hassan get raped,' I said to no one. Baba stirred in his sleep. Kaka Homayoun grunted. A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn't have to live with this lie anymore. But no one woke up and in the silence that followed, I understood the nature of my new curse: I was going to get away with it. (80)

Amir was highly disturbed by the recurring images of Hassan's sexual exploitation. He avoided encountering Hassan. He did not have the courage to face Hassan and avoided speaking much to him. He tried to avoid Hassan as much as possible. For the first time ever, Amir was anxious to go back to school after it reopened. He was happy to go back to school, as he could avoid meeting Hassan. He wanted to be busy and engaged all day, and a lot of homework would mean that he could avoid Hassan. But no matter how hard Amir tried, he could not stop thinking about that incident:

School gave me an excuse to stay in my room for long hours. And, for a while, it took my mind off what had happened that winter, what I had let happen. For a few weeks, I preoccupied myself with gravity and momentum, atoms and cells, the Anglo-Afghan wars, instead of thinking about Hassan and what had happened to him. But, always, my mind returned to the alley. To Hassan's brown corduroy pants lying on

the bricks. To the droplets of blood staining the snow dark red, almost black. (85)

Even when Hassan tried to rekindle things between them, Amir avoided it altogether. On being repeatedly asked, Amir did not say anything to Hassan. He didn't have the courage to face Hassan. It was not easy for Amir. Hassan's presence could be felt everywhere:

Hassan milled about the periphery of my life after that. I made sure our paths crossed as little as possible, planned my day that way. Because when he was around, the oxygen seeped out of the room. My chest tightened and I couldn't draw enough air; I'd stand there, gasping in my own little airless bubble of atmosphere. But even when he wasn't around, he was. He was there in the hand-washed and ironed clothes door, in the wood already burning in the stove when I came down for breakfast. Everywhere I turned, I saw signs of his loyalty, his goddamn unwavering loyalty. (83)

Hassan was as loyal as a dog. Baba reprimanded Amir when Amir suggested Baba to get new servants. Baba rebuked Amir and got really angry and snubbed him for saying such thing. Baba had a strong sense of commitment towards Ali and Hassan. He treated them as family members and loved Hassan like his own son:

He put on his gloves again. 'I grew up with Ali,' he said through clenched teeth. 'My father took him in, he loved Ali like his own son. Forty years Ali's been with my family. Forty goddamn years. And you think I'm just going to throw him out?' He turned to me now, his face as red as a tulip. 'I've never laid a hand on you, Amir, but you ever say

that again...’ He looked away, shaking his head. You bring me shame.

And Hassan...Hassan’s not going anywhere, do you understand? (84)

Finally, Amir tried to break the ice and spoke to Hassan. Amir was actually frustrated and wanted to pay for his sins. He wanted to sleep peacefully. Even after being coaxed and forced, Hassan did not respond. Amir was left frustrated and in pain.

In the summer of 1976, Amir turned thirteen. Things between Baba and Amir started cooling off again. It started the day Amir suggested having new servants. Things became the way they were earlier. Baba and Amir became strangers again. Amir’s story is the story of every child who is born to rich parents, but neglected. Amir’s life lacks love, care, and compassion. Money could not fill the void in his life. Preparations were made for Amir’s thirteenth birthday party. Baba made elaborate arrangements for the party. The party was attended by the who’s who of the social circuit. The birthday bash was a success, but Amir was never enticed by the materialistic things the world offered. He wanted to run away from the glitz and glamour of parties. Upper class mannerisms didn’t appeal much. He was not much into socializing in parties. The expensive gifts and cash that he received on his birthday didn’t make him happy:

Sitting in the middle of my room the next morning, I ripped open box after box of presents. I don’t know why I even bothered, since I just gave them a joyless glance and pitched them to the corner of the room. The pile was growing there: a Polaroid camera, a transistor radio, an elaborate electric train set- and several sealed envelopes containing cash. I knew I’d never spend the money or listen to the radio, and the electric train would never trundle down its tracks in my room. I didn’t

want any of it- it was all blood money; Baba would have never thrown me a party like that if I hadn't won the tournament. (94)

Amir received two gifts from Baba. One, an expensive bicycle that only a handful of kids in Kabul owned and the other was a wristwatch. Amir thanked Baba half-heartedly. He craved for love, affection, and attention from his father who never understood this. Money cannot buy love. Feelings matter the most. The gift that Rahim Khan gave made him happy and he whole-heartedly accepted it. Rahim gifted a leather-bound notebook. Ali and Hassan, too, gifted a book, *Shahnamah*, to Amir. For a servant to gift something to the master is heartening. Shelling money from one's own pocket needs courage.

Soon enough, after the birthday celebrations were over, Amir committed a shameful act. He put his new watch and a few envelopes containing cash under Hassan's mattress. He thought of devising new ways to defame Hassan in the eyes of Baba. It is hard to imagine that Amir would stoop to such a level to defame Hassan. In fact, all this while, Amir was fully aware of the ill deeds he was committing. He knew what he was doing was not morally right. When Baba summoned Hassan and Ali, Hassan took all the blame on him to save Amir, the little rascal. Hassan lied and falsely accepted that he had stolen the watch and cash. Amir did not utter a single word in support of Hassan. Amir's conscience did prick him, but it was momentary. He had mixed feelings. He was ashamed, but also happy because finally he would get rid of Ali and Hassan forever:

Then I understood: This was Hassan's final sacrifice for me. If he'd said no, Baba would have believed him because we all knew Hassan never lied. And if Baba believed him, then I'd be the accused; I would have to explain and I would be revealed for what I really was. Baba

would never, ever forgive me. And that led to another understanding: Hassan knew. He knew I'd seen everything in that alley, that I'd stood there and done nothing. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time. I loved him in that moment, loved him more than I'd ever loved anyone, and I wanted to tell them all that I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake. I wasn't worthy of this sacrifice; I was a liar, a cheat, and a thief. And I would have told, except that a part of me was glad. Glad that this would all be over with soon. Baba would dismiss them, there would be some pain, but life would move on. I wanted that, to move on, to forget, to start with a clean slate. I wanted to be able to breathe again.

(98)

But to Amir's surprise, Baba forgave Hassan. Hassan knew about Amir very well. He knew that Amir had betrayed him on that ill-fated night, but he was still loyal to him. It makes one wonder that how can anyone on this Earth be so loyal? Did Hassan get anything in return? This made Amir really jealous. He wanted to overcome all the barriers that existed between him and Baba. Ali insisted on leaving because he knew the truth behind all the façade. Ali wanted to save Hassan from the clutches of Amir, who was hell-bent on making Hassan's life miserable. Baba could not understand anything and was completely clueless. Baba tried his best to stop Ali and Hassan, but in vain. Baba cried and sobbed, but it didn't alter Ali's decision to leave. It was a really painful moment for Baba as he was deeply attached to them. Ali and Hassan had made up their mind to go to Hazarajat where Ali's cousin lived. Amir saw Baba in pain, but he could not do anything to lessen the suffering. Like a coward, Amir was witnessing everything. He caused a lot of pain to Baba, Hassan, and Ali.

Ali and Hassan are the perfect examples of true, loyal servants. Amir was happy and sad at the same time. This could be the beginning of a new life for Amir.

In March 1981, Amir turned eighteen. Amir and Baba had left their house without informing their seventh servant, Jalaluddin. Things changed in Kabul, a place that was no longer safe. They eloped from their palatial house with a few belongings, so that no one could doubt. Kabul was occupied by *Shorawi* and people were moving towards Pakistan which was a relatively safer place. Kabul was inhabited by the *rafiqs*, the comrades, who ruled the people and the place. In one of the book reviews, Edward Hower rightly remarks, "In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini gives us a vivid and engaging story that reminds us how long his people have been struggling to triumph over the forces of violence- forces that continue to threaten them even today."

Kabul was captured by the Russians who patrolled the streets of the city. It was a war-torn city which was no more idyllic for Amir. It was not easy to reach Peshawar, since there were Russian and Afghan soldiers at various checkpoints on roads, but Baba tried his best to reach that place safely. It was no less than a roller-coaster ride. Their truck was stopped by a Russian soldier, who agreed to free it only on one cost that he should be given half hour with the girl in the truck. The ugly side of the war is shown. This is a gross reality of the war-trodden city. Baba objected to such a demand of the Russian soldier. Baba was a bold and courageous man who did not hesitate to raise his voice against the evil. Here, we see a stark difference between Baba and Amir. Baba was bold, courageous, and dutiful. Amir was a meek, shy, calculative, and a selfish person. Amir was a coward who did not stand up against injustice. Baba risked his life to save the dignity of the woman in the truck.

They finally reached Peshawar after facing a lot of hardships like spending a week in the rat-infested basement, and travelling in a truck which was pitch-black, stinking, and crowded. There was some fault with the truck engine which Toor drove. Till the time the truck was fixed, Amir and Baba had to spend a few days in the basement of that single-storey house. The basement was dank, dark, and had rats. There were other refugees, too, in the basement waiting to be transported by Toor. Of the thirty refugees, Amir saw Kamal and his father who were also hiding. Kamal who was once a handsome young boy had become weak and dull. Just like Hassan, Kamal, too, was sexually exploited by some people. After spending a week in the rat-infested basement, it was informed that the truck could not be repaired. But Karim's another cousin, Aziz, came to their rescue and carried them in his fuel truck. Their passage in the fuel truck was even worse.

It was not easy for a rich lad to experience such a thing. One, who had never seen poverty, was confined to such a small space where it was difficult to even breathe. When Baba told Amir to think of the beautiful times from the past, Amir could only think of Hassan. The best days of his life were surely spent with Hassan. They finally reached Pakistan after going through hell. Amir felt sad for Baba. He thought that Baba's life had reduced to nothing in the end. A man who had worked hard, built a big house, made a big fortune, had nothing in the end except two suitcases and Amir.

They went to Fremont where Baba worked at a gas station. It was an altogether different environment to live in for Baba and Amir. Baba used to get involved in petty fights with other people there. For instance, Baba was involved in a verbal brawl with the owner of a grocery store in Fremont because he was asked to produce an ID for the items he had purchased. It was Amir who pacified the situation.

Amir was a grown-up young man by then. Baba found it difficult to adjust to life in America. It is disheartening to see a man of the stature of Baba working at a gas station. Baba missed his homeland terribly:

I glanced at him across the table, his nails chipped and black with engine oil, his knuckles scraped, the smells of the gas station-dust, sweat, and gasoline-on his clothes. Baba was like the widower who remarries but can't let go of his dead wife. He missed the sugarcane fields of Jalalabad and the gardens of Paghman. He missed people milling in and out of his house, missed walking down the bustling aisles of Shor Bazaar and greeting people who knew him and his father, knew his grandfather, people who shared ancestors with him, whose pasts intertwined with his.

For me, America was a place to bury my memories.

For Baba, a place to mourn his. (119-120)

They had spent only six months in Peshawar, but Baba was happy there. Though Baba and Amir lived in a grimy one-bedroom apartment in Peshawar, it was better than in Fremont, at least for Baba. In Fremont, Amir was a student and Baba, an assistant at a gas station. It was really disturbing for Amir to see his Baba, who was once a rich man, work at a gas station.

In 1983, at the age of twenty, Amir graduated from high school. There had been a transformation in the relationship between Amir and Baba. Baba was no more a reserved person. His attitude towards Amir had changed. May be, this change was a result of the old age and life's hardships. Baba was happy to see his son graduate and felt proud:

He motioned for me to wear my mortarboard, and took a picture of me with the school's clock tower in the background. I smiled for him—in a way, this was his day more than mine. He walked to me, curled his arm around my neck, and gave my brow a single kiss. 'I am moftakhir, Amir,' he said. Proud. His eyes gleamed when he said that and I liked being on the receiving end of that look. (122)

After the graduation ceremony, Baba treated Amir with food and drink at a bar. It was the first time for Amir to taste beer. Baba was so happy that he ordered pitchers for everyone in the bar. That day, after the party was over, Baba gifted an old Ford to Amir. Teary-eyed Amir thanked Baba for his act of kindness. Baba bought it for Amir so that Amir could go to college in his own vehicle. It reminds us of all the hardships that parents face to feed their children. Now, Baba's life revolved around Amir. He worked day and night to provide a comfortable life to Amir, but he still missed Hassan. On hearing Hassan's name, Amir felt choked. Amir could still not forget the past memories: "Then Baba rolled his head toward me. 'I wish Hassan had been with us today,' he said. A pair of steel hands closed around my windpipe at the sound of Hassan's name. I rolled down the window. Waited for the steel hands to loosen their grip." (124)

Amir expressed his desire to be a writer and study literature. Baba found it hard to digest as studying English was not "real work." Amir had made up his mind to major in English. He loved driving for hours in his Ford Torino and every now and then, we could see Amir hunting for new places to see. For Amir, America was a place which would let him forget his past memories and sins.

In the summer of 1984, Amir turned twenty one. Baba bought a dilapidated Volkswagen bus from an Afghan acquaintance. On Saturdays, Amir and Baba would

buy used goods from several places and finally sell the junk for a small profit at San Jose flea market. On Saturdays, they filled their bus with the junk, and on Sundays, they rented a spot at San Jose flea market, and sold the used items for a small profit. The flea market was thronged by Afghan sellers on Sundays. On Sundays, Baba interacted with other Afghans he knew from Kabul at the market. On one of the Sundays, Baba introduced General Taheri to Amir. General Taheri, along with his daughter Soraya, had set up a stall at the market. Mr. Iqbal Taheri worked for the Ministry of Defence when he was in Kabul. Baba and General Taheri knew each other very well. Amir was mesmerized by the beauty of Soraya and was impressed by her in the first meeting. Soraya accompanied her father on all Sundays. Amir thought about her the whole night and it seems he had fallen in love with her: "Lying awake in bed that night, I thought of Soraya Taheri's sickle-shaped birthmark, her gently hooked nose, and the way her luminous eyes had fleetingly held mine. My heart stuttered at the thought of her. Soraya Taheri. My Swap Meet Princess." (131)

Amir soon realized that he was in love with Soraya. He thought about her day and night. At the San Jose flea market, Amir looked for ways and means to catch a glimpse of Soraya Taheri. He wanted to confess his love, but didn't have the courage. It was surprising to know that Amir scored good marks in all the subjects, despite his being constantly lost in Soraya's thoughts. All the while, Baba knew what was going on inside Amir's head. He knew about Amir's inclination towards Soraya. No matter how hard Amir tried to hide facts, Baba knew everything. There is a transformation in the relationship between Amir and Baba. They were more like friends now. After several failed attempts, Amir gathered courage to speak to her. Baba had warned Amir about Soraya's father who was a Pashtun and for whom honor and pride were of utmost importance. Pashtuns were very particular when it came to the chastity of a

wife or a daughter. Amir tried to initiate a conversation with Soraya at the flea market. By Afghan standards, it was bold enough for a young unwed woman to talk to a man. Here, we are told about the position of women in Afghanistan. The people, particularly men, are regressive in their thoughts. Women are not free to talk to any man and they should not talk to strangers either:

Fathers and sons could talk freely about women. But no Afghan girl—no decent and *mohtaram* Afghan girl, at least—queried her father about a young man. And no father, especially a Pashtun with *nang* and *namoos*, would discuss a *mojarad* with his daughter, not unless the fellow in question was a *khastegar*, a suitor, who had done the honorable thing and sent his father to knock on the door. (136)

Soraya was unmarried as she had no suitable suitors. This was a matter of great concern for Soraya's parents. Jamila, Soraya's mother, always entertained Amir. Instead of being angry or suspicious, she was always happy to see him. She had no issues with Amir talking to Soraya. Instead, she greeted him cordially.

Amir thought about her day and night and waited anxiously for Sundays to see her again. He started frequenting Soraya's counter at the flea market. They spoke at length, but in the presence of Jamila. Amir went to meet Soraya only in General's absence. She was no longer a shy girl. She opened her heart out to Amir, but she was afraid of her father. When, for the first time, the General saw Soraya talking to Amir, his reaction was very cold.

After a few days, Baba became unwell. Amir saw Baba coughing bloodstained phlegm. He took Baba to the hospital to get him examined. To Amir's utter dismay, Baba was diagnosed with cancer. Baba was a strong-willed man who showed no sign of remorse even after being told that he had cancer. He didn't lose

heart. How difficult it would have been for a father not to lose heart in front of his only child? Baba wanted Amir to be self-sustained and independent. He wanted him to have a rock-solid heart. Even now, when Baba was on the verge of dying, he expected Amir to be strong. Amir's soft nature was the only thing that disturbed Baba in the past, and which was a matter of concern even now:

A look of disgust swept across his rain-soaked face. It was the same look he'd give me when, as a kid, I'd fall, scrape my knees, and cry. It was the crying that brought it on then, the crying that brought it on now. 'You're twenty-two years old, Amir! A grown man! You...' he opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again, reconsidered. Above us, rain drummed on the canvas awning. 'What's going to happen to you, you say? All those years, that's what I was trying to teach you, how to never have to ask that question.' (144)

Baba wanted Amir to be brave enough to face the ups and downs of life on his own. Even after being diagnosed with cancer, Baba carried on with his life as usual. They went to the flea market as they used to go in the past. Nothing could act as a deterrent. He carried on with his daily routine in a normal manner.

Soon enough, Baba's condition started worsening and he started losing weight. His death was finally approaching. People started coming to Baba's residence to wish him speedy recovery. General Taheri and his daughter also came to see Baba. Before Baba left the world, Amir asked for a favor. Amir requested Baba to ask General Taheri for his daughter's hand. Baba was happy to hear this. He called General Taheri and told him that he would like to meet him. This would be the one last fatherly duty for Baba. Amir was happy and ecstatic to know that General Taheri had accepted the offer, but Soraya wanted to confide the fact that she had run away

with an Afghan man and had lived with him for a month. Since then, things had not been well between Soraya and her father. Being an Afghan girl, she had committed a sin. Even after hearing this, Amir's decision did not change. Soraya didn't want to start a new life with secrets. Even Amir wanted to tell Soraya about the sin he had committed, but he couldn't say a word. He wanted her to know about Hassan, betrayal, and destruction of forty-year relationship between Baba and Ali. Amir preferred to be silent: "I envied her. Her secret was out. Spoken. Dealt with. I opened my mouth and almost told her how I'd betrayed Hassan, lied, driven him out, and destroyed a forty-year relationship between Baba and Ali. But I didn't. I suspected there were many ways in which Soraya Taheri was better person than me. Courage was just one of them." (152)

Finally, the wedding day arrived and Baba was extremely happy to see his son getting married. This was Baba's only desire before he left for his heavenly abode. Baba and Amir went to Taheri's residence for the '*lafz*' ceremony, the ceremony of 'giving word.' The two families exchanged words of admiration and humility. Traditional Afghan weddings take a lot of time. Since, they were short of time, both the families decided to forgo a ceremony or two. Baba spent nearly \$35,000 for the wedding ceremony, *awroussi*. It was all he could afford, but it was still a big fat Afghan wedding. Baba didn't leave any stone unturned to make his only son's wedding a grand affair. Amir and Soraya wedded in a traditional Afghani way. It was a Muslim wedding. This was indeed the best day of Amir's life, and probably of Baba, too. All his life, Amir had been around men. He had never slept with a girl. Soraya was the only lady in his life:

Around 2 A.M., the party moved from the banquet hall to Baba's apartment. Tea flowed once more and music played until the neighbors

called the cops. Later that night, the sun less than an hour from rising and the guests finally gone, Soraya and I lay together for the first time. All my life, I'd been around men. That night, I discovered the tenderness of a woman. (158)

Soraya was a caring and considerate woman. She declined the offer of staying in a separate accommodation after marriage. She preferred staying with Baba in his last hours. Soraya took great care of Baba, just like a mother. She dedicated herself entirely to take care of Baba. She was truly the best daughter-in-law for Baba.

Baba was happy to see the newly-wed couple happy. Amir and Soraya were the perfect example of a happily married couple, and this made Baba ecstatic. Soon, Baba took his last breath, but he died in peace. In his last moments, he was happy to see Amir and Soraya happy. Baba had always lived his life on his own terms. He lived like a king, dictated by his own rules. He was fearless and a strong man. He had gone through several ups and downs in his life. He lost his wife, raised Amir all by himself, left his homeland, and faced poverty: "I thought of the old story of Baba wrestling a black bear in Baluchistan. Baba had wrestled bears his whole life. Losing his young wife. Raising a son by himself. Leaving his beloved homeland, his *watan*. Poverty. Indignity. In the end, a bear had come that he couldn't best. But even then, he had lost on his own terms." (160)

Amir's life was greatly influenced and defined by Baba. He felt a little insecure and terrified as he was deeply shaken by the death of his father. He was "Baba's son" all his life, but now he was all alone. There was no one to show him the way: "Listening to them, I realized how much of who I was, what I was, had been defined by Baba and the marks he had left on people's lives. My whole life, I had

been ‘Baba’s son.’ Now he was gone. Baba couldn’t show me the way anymore; I’d have to find it on my own.” (161)

Amir learnt a lot about General Taheri after his marriage. Soraya gave a detailed description of the General to Amir. Theirs (General and Jamila’s) was not a happy marriage. Mr. Taheri was an orthodox who dominated Jamila. Jamila was an excellent singer, but General Taheri prohibited her from singing in public. She was happy to have Amir as her son-in-law. He was the new delight in Khala’s life. She never really received any attention from her husband, and so when Amir gave her importance, she liked it. Amir had rid her of her greatest fear, the fear that there would be no honorable *khastegar* for her daughter’s hand. She no longer had this fear that her daughter would remain husbandless and childless.

Amir’s outlook towards life was broad. He was not the typical orthodox Afghan man. Had he been so, he would not have married Soraya, at least after knowing about her past life. He was a well-bred, educated man who knew how to respect women. Soraya felt bad and called it unfair when people didn’t call her pure and chaste. Moral policing still exists, more so in the case of women. The position of women has still not changed in Afghanistan. Soraya told Amir that she was tortured after her elopement. After coming back to her home, she didn’t step out of her house. Her father also made her cut off all her hair.

Afghan society treated women differently. Amir was Baba’s son and Baba was someone who lived by his own rules and defied societal customs. And so was Amir, but he also had a past which is why he didn’t bother much about Soraya’s past.

After Baba’s death, Amir and Soraya moved into a one-bedroom apartment in Fremont. Amir sold his VW bus and never went to the flea market again. He took up a job at a furniture warehouse where, after 6 p.m., he studied. That was the place he

began writing his first novel. Soraya enrolled in the teaching track. She wanted to study further and become a teacher. General Taheri didn't like the idea of Soraya being a teacher. He considered teaching an inferior job. He wanted her to be a lawyer or a political scientist, but Soraya wanted to follow her dreams. Teaching was her passion. Taheri's imposition of his choice on his daughter indicates as to how parents often impose their choices on their children, without caring much about their children's desires.

In the summer of 1988, Amir finished writing his first novel. His manuscript was accepted and he was soon going to be a published novelist. A New York agency had accepted the manuscript and wanted to publish the story in the form of a novel. Soraya and the family were ecstatic on hearing the news. Amir thought of Rahim Khan and Hassan and wondered if he really deserved this appreciation. In the summer of 1989, his novel was released and he became a minor celebrity in the Afghan community.

Amir and Soraya tried for more than a year to have a baby, but all attempts failed. Soraya grew irritated and anxious. They decided to consult a doctor. All the blood test results were normal, and the infertility was unexplained. After several failed attempts, doctor suggested IVF, but even IVF proved unsuccessful. Soraya was averse to the idea of 'adoption.' She wanted to have "her" baby. Even the General didn't approve of adoption. He laid a lot of emphasis on "own blood." Here, we are given a peek into the culture of Afghanistan. Like in most other nations, people of Afghanistan also give importance to society, family, and customs: "Now, if you were American, it wouldn't matter. People here marry for love, family name and ancestry never even come into the equation. They adopt that way too, as long as the baby is healthy, everyone is happy. But we are Afghans, bachem." (172-73)

Amir related every wrong happening to his past. Whenever anything wrong happened in his life, he felt that he was being punished for his sins. He felt that he had been denied fatherhood for the things he had done. Soraya and Amir decided to move into another apartment in San Francisco, as Soraya was getting irritated owing to her mother's constant overbearing sympathetic words. It affected their marriage, too. Amir could also feel the emptiness in his life.

In June 2001, Soraya had taken up teaching as a profession. She had been teaching for six years in a school. They adopted a cocker spaniel, Aflatoon. They had been married for around fifteen years now. Amir received the news on phone about Rahim Khan being ill. He decided to go to Pakistan to meet his ailing uncle. Rahim Khan also expressed his desire to meet Amir. Amir suspected that Rahim Khan knew everything about Assef, the kite, money, everything. General Taheri's health started deteriorating. He broke his right hip and had other health complications. Just as it happened with Amir, things softened between Soraya and her father, too. General Taheri's health and time softened things between Soraya and him. Amir still thought about Hassan, even in dreams. Soon, he took a flight to Pakistan.

Amir landed in Peshawar. Even after leaving Afghanistan, Baba was always in touch telephonically with Rahim Khan. Baba had sold the house to Rahim Khan before he and Amir went to US. During those hard times, Rahim Khan didn't leave Kabul as he didn't want to leave his *watan*, his homeland. People of Afghanistan lived in terror. Nothing was left in their lives except rockets, gunfire, or explosions.

Baba's orphanage was also destroyed in gunfire and explosion. Rahim Khan was terribly ill. His death, too, was approaching near. He wanted to meet Amir before he died and to tell him something really important. He wanted to share something

related to Hassan. Hassan had been living with Rahim Khan, since the time Baba and Amir left Kabul.

Rahim Khan narrated to Amir about how he met Hassan. He felt lonely in Kabul because most of his friends and relatives had either been killed or had escaped the country. There was no one he could talk to. He suffered from arthritis and it was difficult for him to maintain Baba's house and take care of it. Finally, Rahim Khan went to Hazarajat in search of Hassan. On reaching Hazarajat, Rahim found out that Hassan was married to Farzana who was expecting a child. Hassan told that his father, Ali, had been killed by a land mine. Hassan asked about Amir and wanted to know a lot about him from Rahim Khan:

It was midway through tea after shorwa that Hassan asked about you. I told him you were in America, but that I did not know much more. Hassan had so many questions about you. Had you married? Did you have children? How tall were you? Did you still fly kites and go to the cinema? Were you happy? He said he had befriended an old Farsi teacher in Bamiyan who had taught him to read and write. If he wrote you a letter, would I pass it on to you? And did I think you would write back? I told him what I knew of you from the few phone conversations I had had with your father, but mostly I did not know how to answer him. Then he asked me about your father. When I told him, Hassan buried his face in his hands and broke into tears. He wept like a child for the rest of that night. (191-92)

Hassan still displayed genuine interest in Amir and Baba, and was heart-broken when he knew about Baba's death. Hassan agreed to move to Kabul along with his wife. He was deeply attached to Baba and on knowing about Baba's death,

he decided to move into that house to take good care of it. Hassan was truly an epitome of loyalty. He did not occupy the room inside the house, but preferred staying in the hut in the backyard, as it would be a mark of disrespect if he lived in the house. He worked day and night in the house and turned it into a beautiful paradise once again. In a war-torn nation, these three (Rahim, Hassan, and Farzana) had made their own heaven in that house.

After suffering the death of her first child, Farzana became pregnant again and gave birth to a boy, Sohrab. Sohrab was named after Hassan's favorite hero from *Shahnamah*. He was the apple of everyone's eyes. Rahim Khan also grew fond of Sohrab. He was very attached to him. Hassan also took his son kite running and they both made a good pair.

In 1996, Taliban had conquered and put an end to the fighting, but their rule was not favorable for the Hazaras. Taliban banned kite fighting and massacred the Hazaras in great number.

Rahim Khan handed over a letter to Amir. Hassan had asked Rahim Khan to deliver it to Amir. In the letter, Hassan spoke about Sohrab, Farzana, and the war-torn Afghanistan. Hassan was still a faithful friend who missed Amir. In the letter, Hassan talked about his longing to see Amir. When Rahim Khan was in Peshawar, he got a call from one of the neighbors in Kabul. Rahim was given the information about Hassan's death. Hassan died at the hands of the Talibs, who also killed Farzana when she protested. When the Talibs found out that Hassan, a Hazara, was living alone in the house, they raided it and asked him to vacate. When Hassan protested, the Talibs shot him dead. Sohrab, now an orphan, was left to live alone in an orphanage in Karteh-Seh.

Rahim Khan requested Amir to bring Sohrab from Karteh-Seh to Pakistan. He wanted Amir to go to Kabul, but he was unwilling to go. He snubbed Amir when he denied the proposal of getting Sohrab back. Rahim Khan's only dying wish to Amir was to get Sohrab back, but Amir was concerned only about his wife, home, and family back in America. He appeared as an ungrateful man who knew nothing about sacrificing. Even after hearing the entire account of Hassan's sacrifices, his heart did not melt. He was afraid to go to Kabul and risk his life. There is a mean streak in him. Hassan's story could've made any person go weak in the knees, but Amir appears unconcerned.

Rahim Khan disclosed another secret to Amir. The process of revealing secrets out of the Pandora's Box started. He told that Sanaubar was not Ali's first wife. Ali had married a Hazara woman who left him as he was sterile. Then, he married Sanaubar. If Ali was sterile, then whose son was Hassan? The fact that Hassan was Baba's son came as a shocking revelation. Amir was really angry at Rahim Khan for disclosing this fact so late. He felt cheated. At the age of thirty-eight, he realized that his entire life was a big lie. This news broke Amir's heart:

'You bastards,' I muttered. Stood up. 'You goddamn bastards!' I screamed. 'All of you, you bunch of lying goddamn bastards!'

'Please sit down,' Rahim Khan said.

'How could you hide this from me? From him?' I bellowed.

'Please think, Amir jan. It was a shameful situation. People would talk. All that a man had back then, all that he was, was his honor, his name, and if people talked...We couldn't tell anyone, surely you can see that.' He reached for me, but I shed his hand. Headed for the door.

'Amir jan, please don't leave.'

I opened the door and turned to him. Why? What can you possibly say to me? I'm thirty-eight years old and I've just found out my whole life is one big fucking lie! What can you possibly say to make things better? Nothing. Not a goddamn thing! (206)

Amir thought about his past life, and how Baba had always been protective about Hassan. He had been oblivious of the fact that Hassan was his step-brother:

How could I have been blind? The signs had been there for me to see all along: they came flying back at me now: Baba hiring Dr. Kumar to fix Hassan's harelip. Baba never missing Hassan's birthday. I remembered the day we were planting tulips, when I had asked Baba if he'd ever consider getting new servants. Hassan's not going anywhere, he'd barked. He's staying right here with us, where he belongs. This is his home and we're his family. He had wept, wept, when Ali announced he and Hassan were leaving us. (207-08)

Images of Hassan and Baba danced before his eyes. This shocking revelation shook him to the core. All his life, Baba had always emphasized on theft being the worst kind of sin and in the end, Baba turned out to be the biggest thief, the one who stole identity from Hassan, honor from Ali, and reality from Amir. To Amir, everything appeared a sham. It was difficult for him to reconcile to the new image of Baba with the one that had been imprinted on his mind for so long. Baba and Amir had betrayed the people who would have given their lives for them. Both cheated the people who were dutiful and loyal. In this sense, Baba and Amir were alike. Amir's life was a cycle of lies, betrayals, and secrets.

Amir changed his mind and decided to go to Kabul. Baba always complained of Amir not fighting for himself, but this time, Amir made up his mind to do his own

fighting. He remembered about Hassan and his sacrifices and unconditional love: “I looked at the round face in the Polaroid again, the way the sun fell on it. My brother’s face. Hassan had loved me once, loved me in a way that no one ever had or ever would again. He was gone now, but a little part of him lived on. It was in Kabul. Waiting.” (210)

Amir made all the preparations to go to Afghanistan. This was his last chance at redemption. He disguised himself into an Afghan man and wore a *pakol*, an artificial chest length beard. People in Afghanistan suffered from post-war traumatic disorder. Amir was visiting Afghanistan after a very long time. He had spent nearly twenty years in America. Farid, the driver, helped Amir and drove him from Peshawar to Afghanistan. It was a long and tiresome journey. In the middle of the journey, Amir stopped for a while at Farid’s house. Initially, Farid was under the assumption that Amir was coming to Afghanistan to sell the house, collect the money, and run away like a mouse to America, just like the other Afghans had been doing. But, on knowing the truth, Farid decided to help Amir in finding the whereabouts of Sohrab. Amir got emotional when he landed in Afghanistan. He felt the kinship for the lost land of Afghanistan:

I sat against one of the house’s clay walls. The kinship I felt suddenly for the old land...it surprised me. I’d been gone long enough to forget and be forgotten. I had a home in a land that might as well be in another galaxy to the people sleeping on the other side of the wall I leaned against. I thought I had forgotten about this land. But I hadn’t. And, under the bony glow of a half-moon, I sensed Afghanistan humming under my feet. Maybe Afghanistan hadn’t forgotten me either. (222)

Afghans are great hospitable people. Amir was warmly welcomed to Farid's house. Farid's family had been living in absolute poverty. Their own family had nothing to eat, but they cooked a meal for Amir as he was a guest. Amir was greatly touched by this kind gesture and planted a fistful of crumpled money under the mattress before leaving. Though there are certain flaws in his character, he also has a heart of gold.

The next morning, they drove from Jalalabad to Kabul. Kabul was not as Amir had remembered it. It had undergone a complete transformation. Kabul was an alien land now as it was occupied by the Taliban. There were beggars all around and no kite shops. The plight of the people in Kabul saddened him: "A sadness came over me. Returning to Kabul was like running into an old, forgotten friend and seeing that life hadn't been good to him, that he'd become homeless and destitute" (227). Atmosphere of terror and bloodshed gripped Kabul. The *talibs* were savage and cruel people who terrorized the inhabitants. The Russians were bad, but the *talibs* were worse. The condition of the people was horrible. The who's who of Afghanistan was subjected to torture.

Farid and Amir found the new orphanage in Karteh-Seh. They went there to take Sohrab along with them. They met a man who introduced himself as the director of the orphanage. Zaman, the director, looked suspiciously at Amir, but soon realized that he was innocent and not a *talib*. The orphanage didn't get enough money and food for its proper functioning. The *talibs* didn't give enough money to care for the children who had lost their childhood. The condition at the orphanage was horrible. The *talibs* were hungry wolves who preyed on young girls at the orphanage for their sexual gratification. At times, these wolves also took boys along with them and one of the boys was Sohrab. Zaman told them about a *talib* official who took Sohrab away

and that official could be seen at the Ghazi stadium. If Zaman tried to protest, the talib official took ten children instead of one. So, Zaman thought that silence would be the best solution. The *talib* official gave money in return, the money with which Zaman bought food items for the other children. Zaman's hands were tied and he could not do anything in this regard. Hell broke loose when Amir heard that.

Poverty was prevalent everywhere. It was a nerve-racking trip for Amir as he could see the striking contrast between the life in America and Afghanistan. Human beings were treated not more than animals. Farid and Amir went to Wazir Akbar Khan district to see Baba's house. Old memories revived and within seconds, Amir was back in time. He was transported to the old times when he lived with Hassan. The house had lost its sheen and splendor. Amir was lost in his own thoughts of past life. He wanted to live that life once again, in that same house. He checked out each and every nook and corner of the house. He visited all the spots he and Hassan frequented together. Amir's past was standing in front of him.

Finally, Farid and Amir met the same man who had taken Sohrab with him. Amir gathered courage and inquired about Sohrab. His world came to a standstill when he found out that the huge *talib* was 'Assef' and it was he who had held Sohrab captive. Earlier it was Hassan, now Hassan's child. Assef's parents had settled in Australia and were earning huge money, but he fought *Shorawi* and joined the Taliban. Amir lost his cool and snubbed Assef. Assef was stoning adulterers, raping children, and massacring Hazaras. When Amir expressed his desire to take Sohrab away with him, Assef agreed but with a condition. Assef ordered his guards to close the door of the room as he wanted to finish an old bit of business with Amir. Assef said that whoever walked out of the room alive would be the winner. He took out his stainless-steel brass knuckles, and then followed a long and painful fight. Amir was

beaten brutally. At one point, Amir laughed which Assef found amusing. Amir felt that he had met the punishment he truly deserved. He felt better and happy as if he was waiting for this to happen. He thought about Hassan and felt healed:

WHAT'S SO FUNNY? Assef bellowed. Another rib snapped, this time left lower. What was so funny was that, for the first time since the winter of 1975, I felt at peace. I laughed because I saw that, in some hidden nook in a corner of my mind, I'd even been looking forward to this. I remembered the day on the hill I had pelted Hassan with pomegranates and tried to provoke him. He'd just stood there, doing nothing, red juice soaking through his shirt like blood. Then he'd taken the pomegranate from my hand, crushed it against his forehead. Are you satisfied now? he'd hissed. Do you feel better? I hadn't been happy and I hadn't felt better, not at all. But I did now. My body was broken- just how badly I wouldn't find out until later- but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed. (265-66)

At last, the silence was broken. Sohrab held the slingshot pointing to Assef's face. Sohrab warned Assef, just as Hassan had warned him years ago. Assef was hit in the left eye with the slingshot and he bled profusely. He cried like a wounded animal. Ultimately, Sohrab left with Amir. Amir's body was also battered. Farid drove away with Sohrab and Amir. Here, it is pertinent to mention that Amir did not fight back. He was a passive player. It was Sohrab who had to ultimately intervene and help Amir. If Sohrab had not been there, Amir would have died. Years ago, Hassan saved Amir from the clutches of Assef. Years later, Sohrab rescued Amir from Assef's tyranny. Baba was right when he said that Amir could not stand up against anything, but it was not true now. Amir risked his life to rescue Sohrab.

Amir was admitted in a hospital in Peshawar. He had suffered severe injuries and a surgery had to be performed. He also suffered several broken ribs and various lacerations and the worst was on the upper lip. His condition was so severe that he was advised liquid diet for six weeks. He thanked Sohrab and Farid for helping him. When he enquired about Rahim Khan, Farid said that Rahim Khan had left and no one knew about his whereabouts. But before going, Rahim Khan had left a letter and a small key for Amir.

Amir read Rahim Khan's letter. Rahim's letter was a nail in the coffin. All that was in Amir's heart was out on the paper. This letter was the new dawn in Amir's life. Rahim urged Amir to forgive himself and not to torture himself anymore. He hoped that Amir's suffering would come to an end with this journey to Afghanistan. He requested Amir to forgive him, Baba, and himself:

Amir Jan, I know how hard your father was on you when you were growing up. I saw how you suffered and yearned for his affections, and my heart bled for you. But your father was a man torn between two halves, Amir Jan: you and Hassan...So he took it out on you instead-Amir, the socially legitimate half, the half that represented the riches he had inherited and the sin-with-impunity privileges that came with them. When he saw you, he saw himself. And his guilt...Your father, like you, was a tortured soul, Amir Jan...And this is what I want you to understand, that good, real good, was born out of your father's remorse. Sometimes, I think everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. And that, I believe, is what true redemption is, Amir Jan, when guilt leads to good. I know

that in the end, God will forgive...But, most important, forgive yourself. (276-77)

For Amir, the only way to break free from the clutches of guilt is to atone for his childhood sins. As rightly quoted by Sarah A Smith:

Hosseini conjures the awful feeling of guilt that childhood wrongdoing can induce, the fear that one is forever branded as the result of one's actions. In fact, from Kabul to California, where he and Baba make their home in the 1980s after an arduous escape from Afghanistan, Amir is never free from the burden of his sin. The love of a good woman and astonishingly rapid success as a novelist cannot rescue him. Atonement lies only in a return to his native city in the summer of 2001, and a remarkable mercy mission.

Before leaving Peshawar, Rahim Khan had left his savings in a safe-deposit box and the key was given to Amir. Rahim requested Amir not to search for him. Farid sensed danger lurking in Peshawar and he thought that it was better for Amir to leave Peshawar as the Taliban had friends there, too, and they must be looking for him. During his brief stay in the hospital, Amir tried to get friendly with Sohrab but life had silenced him. Sohrab used to remain quiet the whole day. He flinched when Amir showed love and affection.

Amir had a plan in mind. He would leave the hospital early, get the money and pay the medical bills, drop Sohrab off with John and Betty Caldwell (owners of the orphanage in Peshawar), ride to Islamabad, and finally to America. But to Amir's surprise, Farid told that no such persons by the name of John and Betty Caldwell existed in Peshawar. So, they took the money from the bank and headed to Islamabad.

With no one to look after Sohrab in Peshawar, Amir decided to take him along to Islamabad.

They finally reached Islamabad. When Farid left Islamabad, Amir gave him an envelope containing around two thousand dollars. The amount was huge and Farid was overwhelmed. Farid had been of great help to Amir. Amir and Sohrab stayed in a hotel for some time. All the atrocities of life had silenced Sohrab. A child must be given love, care, attention, security, and a safe environment. The things necessary for a child's development were missing in the lives of Afghani children: "There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood." (291)

Sohrab was as innocent as his father who was unaffected by the ways of the world. He was so innocent that he felt that he must have done something wrong by hitting Assef in the eye. The question which Sohrab poses in the novel is the question that every weaker or marginalized sect of the society asks the world: "Why did people want to hurt my father?" Sohrab said in a wheezy little voice. "He was never mean to anyone" (292). This is the problem that every nation faces. The barriers are created on the basis of caste, creed, religion, sex, financial status, and others. Stronger ones survive and the weaker ones are subjected to cruelty, discrimination, and inequality. Hassan never hurt anyone. Still, he was mistreated and considered an unequal. He was just a Hazara. That was a bitter truth. But, Sohrab was too young to understand all that. He was terribly shaken by all that had happened to him in the past. Assef and other men did things to Sohrab which jolted him and prevented him in leading a normal life. Like his father, Sohrab was also sexually exploited at the hands of Assef and others. Finally, after several failed attempts, Sohrab displayed confidence and let Amir embrace him. Amir expressed his desire to take Sohrab away with him to America. Their relationship grew stronger with the passage of time. Sohrab was no

longer afraid of people around him. They went on a picnic one day. There, Amir disclosed the fact that he and Hassan were half-brothers. Amir popped the question again. Initially, Sohrab was hesitant as he felt insecure and scared. He was not sure whether Soraya would accept him. Amir gathered courage and called Soraya to seek her permission. He confessed everything and told every little secret that he had kept from her in fifteen years of marriage. After this confession, he felt something lifted off his chest. He expressed his desire to adopt Sohrab. Soraya readily accepted his offer and was more than excited to look at him. Soraya was a wife every husband aspired for. She didn't show the slightest aversion towards Amir for hiding secrets.

They went to the American embassy in Islamabad to complete the formalities. Amir was interviewed by an American who interrogated him. He expressed his desire to take Sohrab with him to America, but Andrews' response was not favorable. He didn't issue Sohrab a visa to US. Andrews had two demands: firstly, the death certificates of Sohrab's deceased parents and secondly, the cooperation of Afghanistan as there was no American embassy in Kabul. As the meeting didn't turn out fruitful, Andrews handed a business card to Amir. Andrews suggested Amir to get in touch with an immigration lawyer, Omar Faisal. Soraya, too, tried her best to help Amir in every way she could. He even called a few adoption agencies that arranged international adoptions, but nothing worked out.

The other day, they met Omar Faisal, the immigration lawyer. Amir explained the whole situation to him, everything that had happened. Omar suggested Amir to procure death certificates from Afghanistan, which was nearly impossible, given the situation there. Basically, getting Sohrab adopted was a herculean task. Omar suggested all possible options that could help in the adoption. There was no ray of hope left.

The only solution that Omar gave was that Sohrab must be sent to an orphanage for a while in Islamabad, and then Amir could file an orphan petition. That was the INS formality. On being told, Sohrab cried in anguish. He was unwilling to go to an orphanage again. He requested Amir not to send him there, but there was no option.

Suddenly, Amir got a call from Soraya. Soraya had earlier told Amir that Kaka Sharif might help them as he had some of INS friends who could help in procuring humanitarian visa. Amir was ecstatic to know that. He opened the bathroom door to give the good news to Sohrab, but he was shocked to see Sohrab lying in a pool of blood. He had cut his wrist with a blade. He was admitted to hospital. On seeing Sohrab in such a situation, Amir's world turned upside down. He felt anxious and nervous. After a gap of around fifteen years, Amir could be seen offering *namaz*. He asked for God's forgiveness as he had lost Hassan, but he didn't want to lose Sohrab. He prayed to God and asked for his forgiveness:

There is a God, there has to be, and now I will pray, I will pray that He forgive that I have neglected Him all of these years, forgive that I have betrayed, lied, and sinned with impunity only to turn to Him now in my hour of need, I pray that He is as merciful, benevolent, and gracious as His book says He is. I bow to the west and kiss the ground and promise that I will do zakat, I will do namaz, I will fast during Ramadan and when Ramadan has passed I will go on fasting, I will commit to memory every last word of His holy book, and I will set on a pilgrimage to that sweltering city in the desert and bow before the Ka'bah too. I will do all of this and I will think of Him every day from this day on if He only grants me this one wish: My hands are stained

with Hassan's blood; I pray God doesn't let them get stained with the blood of his boy too. (317)

Soon enough, Dr. Nawaz broke the news to Amir and said that Sohrab was well. He was alive. This news brought Amir back to life once again. He was in deep shock all that while, but was relieved on hearing the news. Sohrab had attempted suicide because Amir had broken his promise. He had promised Sohrab that he would never send him to an orphanage. But when Amir tried to give the good news to Sohrab, it was too late. Sohrab was again heart-broken, but Amir tried again to gain his confidence. Amir apologized to Sohrab and asked him to trust him last time. Sohrab didn't want to trust anymore.

About a week later, Amir flew down to America with Sohrab. Sohrab was not ecstatic to go with Amir. It was just a quiet surrender as he had no place to go. He missed his old days. Soraya warmly greeted Sohrab on his arrival. She had also turned the study upstairs into a bedroom for Sohrab but he didn't appear happy or cheerful. He looked uninterested and this bothered Amir.

Khala Jamila was comfortable with Amir's decision of adopting Sohrab, but General Taheri was apprehensive. General thought it degrading to live with a Hazara boy. Amir defended his decision of adopting Sohrab as he was his nephew. Amir disclosed about his father's infidelity and this revelation shocked everyone. Sohrab didn't live like a free-bird in the house. He was very hesitant. His presence remained unnoticed most of the times. Soraya was disappointed to see an unhappy Sohrab. She had motherly plans which she could not execute. She wanted to shower motherly affection on Sohrab. This was the time when the Twin Towers were attacked in September. America retaliated and bombed Afghanistan. It was the end of Taliban.

Soraya and Amir became involved in Afghan projects that aimed at treating Afghan refugees with land mine injuries.

In March 2002, General Taheri was finally summoned to Afghanistan for a ministry position. General left for Afghanistan and Amir had opened a pediatric clinic in Rawalpindi. Things were getting back to normal in Fremont. Amir and others frequented Lake Elizabeth Park and chatted with other Afghans. Hamid Karzai again took over Afghanistan. He returned after twenty eight years of exile. Sohrab had stopped interacting with his new family members and avoided social gatherings. He had become a recluse. He was an introvert lost in his own thoughts. It was painful for both Amir and Soraya to see a mute boy. Despite Amir and Soraya's several attempts to make him happy, Sohrab didn't show interest.

One day, at Lake Elizabeth Park in Fremont, where Afghans had gathered for socializing, Amir found a kite-seller. Old memories revived. Amir became a child again. His childhood stood in front of him; the only difference being that in place of Hassan, now it was Sohrab. To break the monotony in Sohrab's life, this was the last attempt for Amir. Just like Satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden apple, Amir wanted to tempt Sohrab to try his hand at flying kite and feel like a free bird. Sohrab gave into the temptation and helped Amir in flying kite. For all these years, Sohrab had not known what childhood meant. But today, the child in him could be witnessed. Amir's life has come to a full circle. He remembered the day when he had won the kite tournament. His achievement was the smile on Baba's face. And today, it was a smile on Sohrab's face. This was just a small step. The battle was yet to be won. But, Amir was happy that it had at least begun. The smile on Sohrab's face was a ray of hope for Amir and Soraya:

It was only a smile, nothing more. It didn't make everything all right. It didn't make anything all right. Only a smile. A tiny thing. A leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird's flight. But I'll take it. With open arms. Because when spring comes, it melts the snow one flake at a time, and maybe I just witnessed the first flake melting.

(340)

Amir, the protagonist of the novel *The Kite Runner*, is a great character to study the tenets and domains of humanistic psychology and also to understand the strands and dilemmas of humanity in general. Humanists aim to study psychology with keeping humans in the center and understand their mind, behavior, and daily dispositions.

Amir had a series of meaningful and also unfortunate events that made him the person he was. To understand the course of his life, his primary mindset and dispositions, one needs to understand the roots of his early life and upbringing. Amir's life witnesses a drastic contrast between his adulthood and childhood. During childhood, he is provided with all the luxuries by his father, but the basic requirements like the warmth of a mother or the unconditional acceptance of a father is missing. Here, Rogers' 'theory of self' is in play. The theory emphasizes on how we form an identity or a self-identity at a young age by getting influenced by our environment. If the environment favors us positively, we build a strong positive sense of self that helps us to make correct decisions in life. In Amir's case, the readers witness how he felt the lack of his maternal love because he lost his mother at a young age. At the same time, he felt rejected and not loved by his father. His father was strong and a man of honor. He had predefined notions about how a man should be and those notions were everything Amir wasn't. Amir, at an early age, did feel the

lack of paternal love, but was strong enough to pursue things he liked. Here, it is pertinent to mention that Amir didn't receive unconditional positive regard in the form of complete love and acceptance from his father and that is bound to create flaws in his character.

On the other hand, Amir's basic needs were fulfilled. He had everything that a well-off family possesses- a house, a roof over the head, food to eat, and security from the outside world. These basic primary needs were fulfilled by his father. What Amir lacked was the need to belong. Maslow states that whenever we feel a lack of something in our lives, it creates a motive or desire in us to achieve something that compensates the dearth. The primary aim of the person becomes to fulfill that need and replace that deficiency with satisfaction. These are the primary instincts we humans have. In Amir's case, this is exactly what happens. On one hand, he did everything to gain acceptance from his father and also belonged and relied upon his childhood friend, Hassan. Amir was subconsciously looking out for ways to fulfill the need for belongingness. The need for belongingness is the third need in the hierarchy of Maslow's theory and is placed before esteem needs. It is to be noted here that it is a privilege to gain esteem, make correct decisions, choose good over evil, and to inherit or possess the morals. These privileges are placed on the top two levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and they are developed under unconditional positive circumstances. Amir, while growing up, did not have both. He was fixated at the third level of hierarchy and also did not get complete positive regard from his father. Amir was not his best self with Hassan. He was jealous and filled with negative thoughts and, at times, he did not save Hassan from troubles. On the other hand, Hassan was just opposite to Amir. Hassan was a great friend to him. He cared for him and loved him, and always considered it his duty to protect him like a brother. The contrast in

their attitudes comes from the way their respective fathers behaved. Even though they grew up in the same house, Hassan was loved both by his own father and also by Amir's father, whereas Amir was not given adequate attention by his father. Hassan grew up to be loving and loyal, while Amir grew up to possess certain faults in his character. Here, it is important to understand that even though Amir possesses the traits of cowardice and jealousy, he did not hate Hassan either. Though he considered him as a companion and not a friend, he still cherished the moments he had spent with him.

After having understood the roots and early life of Amir, the novel progresses onto the segment which creates a huge impact on Amir. In order to gain acceptance from his father, Amir decided to excel in a kite flying tournament. Amir appeared as a nervous but determined child. He made it his goal to win the tournament so as to win appreciation of Baba. The nervousness stems out from the fear of failure. Here, Amir's primary goal is to gain acceptance and feel a sense of belongingness with his father. This is a classic example of Maslow's theory. At this stage, Amir doesn't want to win this tournament because he wants to win laurels and be applauded by the crowd, but he wants his father to treat him equal to Hassan and love him. Amir did win and everything he wished for came true. Baba was proud, warm, and affectionate towards Amir and he couldn't be happier. In the kite flying contest, Amir was the kite flyer and Hassan was the runner. Soon enough, an incident occurred that shook Amir's psyche. Hassan proved to be a loyal friend of Amir when he refused to give the last kite to the hooligans who bullied him and Amir. As a result of this defiance, Hassan was sexually assaulted by the bully, Assef. Amir witnessed the entire event with his own eyes and didn't step up to stop the diabolic event. Amir stood there and witnessed everything. The psychological reason behind his insensitivity is rooted in

his childhood insecurities. Amir was also very jealous of Hassan because of latter's intelligence and Baba's affection towards him. All these emotions of envy, hate, anger, and cowardice find outlet in a single behavior of not standing up for Hassan. Even though Amir witnessed the loyalty of Hassan, all he could think about was the acceptance from his Baba and, therefore, he didn't pay any heed to Hassan's plight. Amir also showed signs of fear in that scene- fear of getting hurt and not being able to fight off the hooligans. Amir, as a child, had been emotionally hurt because of lack of paternal love. That psychological injury had made him weak and not capable of putting up a fight. Amir also had a low self-esteem that stemmed out of non-acceptance. That low self-esteem turned into anger, hate, selfishness, and self-protective defense mechanism wherein he thought of protecting himself first, rather than helping his friend, Hassan. Had Amir felt completely accepted by Baba and received unconditional positive regard in his childhood, the feeling of jealousy would have never cropped up. Amir would have followed his natural human course of possessing innate good nature. He would have had a high self-esteem and a good relationship with Hassan. He would also have the courage to step up for Hassan and not fear for his protection.

The humanists have focused immensely on how environment can be a dominant factor in shaping a life. The environment and events of childhood shape a person's personality and humanists decoded its mechanism. Some of the traits that a child possesses at an early age tend to last for a longer span of time. The humanists also study deeply the effect of the conscious mind on the person. When a person has a motive, he also has a psychological reason behind it as mentioned in the hierarchy of needs. Sometimes, when a negative event takes place, a person either activates

defense mechanisms or rationalizes the event in his mind in order to protect the self-esteem. Amir did the same while Hassan was being bullied by Assef.

Amir's mind was conditioned to believe in the class and caste system and as a result, he considered himself superior to Hassan. He regarded Hassan as a member of lower caste. He rationalized his act by quoting an example. Just like a sheep which has to be sacrificed for a higher purpose of religion, a lower caste person like Hassan must also sacrifice for the goods of higher caste. This is a classic example to show as to how Amir is trying to defend his own self when in reality, his self-identity is questioned and guilt has risen in his mind. Amir never spoke about it to anybody, thus showing the same trait of self-protection and rationalization.

The event took a great toll on Amir. Amir was drowning in guilt and suffocation. He avoided Hassan on all occasions and could not face him, but in reality, he could not face himself. He could not confront what he had done and could not deal with it and, therefore, he became more negative towards Hassan. Amir started committing more shameful acts. As a result, his pile of wrongdoings increased. In this incident, Amir's fear and guilt overpowers his rational mind and makes him indulge in more shameful acts. Amir, in order to get rid of Hassan, tried to label him as a thief and plans to get him thrown out of the house. All of Amir's efforts fail because Baba refuses to distance himself from Hassan.

This chapter of Amir's life ended when Hassan, along with his father, left the house and disappeared forever. Though they were gone forever, Amir still could not get over that horrible incident involving Hassan. He always thought about it. He grew into a guilty and self-conscious person who no longer felt the need for affection from his father, but felt the need for getting rid of the shame and guilt that had taken a home in his heart.

The next phase of his life started when he turned into an adult. Life took a difficult turn when they had to flee from their home to California. He graduated, landed a job, and found a suitable partner, but the childhood incident involving Hassan kept pestering him. Amir was always an insecure child, given the circumstances. He also showed traits of cowardice when he didn't come clean about his past actions. Soraya, in contrast to Amir, was a strong-hearted woman who came clean about her previous affairs before marriage. Amir, being the coward he was, could only admire her honesty and not reciprocate the same. Here, it can be seen that the primary aim for Amir was belongingness with Soraya and so, he could not tell her the truth about his past sins lest it could sabotage the relationship. This shows how scared and insecure he grew up to be. He was always hiding under the shadow of Baba who brought him safely from Afghanistan to California.

After the unfortunate death of his father, Amir grew more anxious. Amir is seen as a person who is fixated on his past. He felt that he himself was responsible for all the wrong things that happened in his life. He related the loss of his father and Soraya's inability to conceive a baby to the sins he had committed in the past. Amir always felt empty when he wondered about his past. He was psychologically affected by that childhood incident. The environmental situations had affected Amir in a way that he was not able to cope very well psychologically. The only happiness Amir received was from the unconditional love of Soraya. He felt that he could finally let go off his past. The warmth provided in the environment favors the innate nature of a human being. Humanists believe that the basic innate nature of a human being is to be good and positive. If a person is given a favorable environment, he or she develops a positive outlook or traits in character. If the environmental conditions are not favorable, a person can suppress his real nature and grows with faults and negative

approach in life. The maximum emphasis is given on circumstances in childhood. That is the time when most of the ideas about self and others are made. Carl Rogers explained the importance of a fulfilled, loving, and caring environment for making the innate good nature to flourish.

When Amir did not receive such fulfilling environment in his childhood, he grew to be insecure and jealous, but when he received positive regard from his father in his adult life and love from Soraya that was unconditional in nature, he grew to become more sensitive towards self and others. Amir does not come across as an entirely evil man with negative disposition. He is caring towards Soraya. He is open-minded and remains undeterred in his love for Soraya despite her admittance. He also cares his father and treats Soraya as an equal partner in marriage. He also grows passionate about his work and writing after Soraya encourages and praises his work. The positivity, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard in the environment help Amir to bring out his positive innate nature and become a good novelist with excellent skills in his craft.

Becoming a novelist would satiate and satisfy Amir's need for esteem in life. After Amir and Baba left their homeland, they came face to face with unbearable circumstances and struggled to fill their bellies. They both receded to the first stage of 'hierarchy of needs' which comprises of the physiological needs. Their primary and only aim was to survive. They somehow managed to land a job and become financially stable in life. This was the time when Amir met Soraya and had the desire to be with her. This is another classical example for humanists to prove how the environment affects the life, behavior and desires. If, for example, Amir had not found stability in life and fulfilled his basic physiological needs by feeding himself and Baba, his desire to marry Soraya would not have cropped up. Being in a

relationship with Soraya would not fulfill his physiological needs, but would fulfill his need for belongingness that generates in a person only when the basic physiological and security needs are fulfilled. Till the time Amir did not feel capable enough to buy daily bread and provide security for himself and Baba, he did not feel the desire for Soraya's love. This is how environmental circumstances have an effect on the personality and life course of a person. Later, when Soraya married Amir, his need to belong and be loved was fulfilled. He climbed the ladder of 'hierarchy of needs' and reached on the fourth level now. He now had the desire for esteem and respect, something he craved all his life. The esteem need was fulfilled when he became a famous novelist in the Afghan circle. These examples provide an explanation of how needs and desires develop in a human being and how they are placed in a perfect hierarchy as mentioned by Maslow.

The next event in Amir's life that shaped his personality occurred when he realized that Rahim Khan was ill. He made his way to meet his ailing uncle in Peshawar. Rahim Khan had played his part very well in building Amir's personality. Amir gives some credit to Rahim Khan also for providing encouragement and motivation to him to become a novelist. Rahim was the only one after Hassan who provided unconditional love and support to Amir and also provided him with the environment where his creativity could grow. Since Amir had feelings of jealousy towards Hassan, he could not see the love and sacrifices Hassan made for him. Even after the passage of so many years, Amir still cared a lot about Rahim Khan and so, when Rahim's health started deteriorating, Amir goes to Peshawar to see him. This would have never happened if Rahim had not provided Amir with the unconditional love. Rogers' theory has again proven to be true in this incident in Amir's life.

Rahim shared with Amir the account of how Hassan and his wife died because of their unwavering loyalty towards Amir and Baba. Even after hearing the news of sacrifice, Amir appeared unaffected. He refused to rescue Hassan's son from Kabul. His sheer refusal stems out of his selfish behavior that has emerged as a result of his jealousy and hatred towards Hassan. It can be attributed to the fact that Amir's father failed to provide a secure environment for Amir to grow with positive feelings and traits. Amir's refusal also shows that he is stuck at the third and fourth level of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs.' To rescue Hassan's son would be a very challenging and unreal task for Amir for various reasons. Firstly, Hassan was somebody he had no contact for years. Secondly, he did not have positive feelings for Hassan, and to rescue Hassan's son from a war-torn country would require great compassion and sacrifice and a feeling of empathy that Amir lacked. All these traits are the traits of being self-actualized and reaching the topmost level in the hierarchy laid down by Maslow in his theory. To reach that state, other lower needs should be fulfilled and those lower levels should remain fulfilled for a long time. Amir thought about his life and wife back at home, and realized that he could not sabotage that for the son of a person he rarely had positive feelings for. Consequently, he was focused on the third and fourth level of the hierarchy and could not go beyond it. The feelings of sacrifice and compassion arise when a person's worldly needs of food, people, and self-esteem are fulfilled. Only then, a person is able to think beyond his personal needs and think of needs of others. When people reach the state of self-actualization, they become sensitive to the needs of others and cultivate a sense to become their best self or reach their highest potential as humans. This happens only when either all the needs of Maslow's hierarchy theory are fulfilled or a person has received unconditional love in his tender age. Here, it can be noticed that Amir neither received unconditional love

in his childhood nor all his needs are fulfilled. Therefore, for Amir, it is hard to be in a situation where he needs to sacrifice his own needs and happiness for the needs of others.

The next big event that changed the entire psyche of Amir occurred when Rahim Khan made a revelation. Rahim revealed that Hassan was not Ali's son and so, he was not a lower class person as people assumed him to be. Hassan was, in fact, the son of Baba and half-brother of Amir. This news came as a shock to Amir. Everything that Amir thought to be true was not true anymore. Amir soon realized that his life was a lie. All the wrong things he did to Hassan haunted him. Here, the readers must closely witness the change in Amir's psyche that has radically transformed for Amir in his later years of life. All his life, he thought that he did not receive any unconditional love and acceptance in his childhood. He overlooked Hassan's love and sacrifice for him. But, when he realized that he was immensely loved and cared by his half-brother, Hassan, it resulted in a radical change of Amir's heart. He realized what he always had, but didn't care about. This unconditional love and sacrifice initiated a change of heart in Amir. Carl Rogers has explained the importance of how unconditional love can help a personality evolve and how positive traits can be imprinted on a persona. When Amir got to know the truth about Hassan, he experienced the change of mind and the change of psyche that led to a change in his personality in a positive manner. He became empathetic and felt guilty for mistreating Hassan and took a vow to rescue Hassan's son. Here, one should closely witness that Amir still has needs that are placed on the third and fourth level of hierarchy, but he has been suddenly transported to the fifth stage of hierarchy representing self-actualization, and this was made possible due to his acceptance of the fact that he was actually loved, cared, and respected unconditionally by Hassan in

his childhood. In order to understand the needs of a human on the basis of Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory, it is crucial to understand the effect of environmental factors on the person and apply Carl Rogers' 'theory of self' and the concept of unconditional love. Maslow explains how human beings have needs and how they move from one need to another. Carl Rogers explains why humans have the needs they have. Both these concepts together shed light on behaviors, motivations, drives, psyche, and needs of a human being. In Amir's case, the readers witness that Amir's motivation and drive changed suddenly when he realized the truth. Before Amir knew the actual truth about Hassan, he was fixated on his personal needs because he received the acceptance of positive environmental factors as explained by Rogers, but that changed because the truth about the environment changed. This is a perfect example of witnessing the amalgamation of the two major theories of humanistic psychology. Personality, however tangible it may be, is based upon major principles that are laid down by the humanists.

Another major thing to notice here is that humanists focus on the innate good nature of a human being. Humanists state that a person is basically good in nature that requires a positive environment to manifest. Amir was devoid of that positive environment earlier, but with this new revelation, he has got an opportunity to explore that goodness within him. The goodness did not emerge suddenly as it remained dormant and waited to manifest. It was, in fact, always present in Amir's personality. It finally manifested with the truth about Hassan and his sacrifices. Amir's environmental conditions favor him to look beyond his personal needs and consider the needs of others. Amir didn't do anything under anybody's pressure, but he did everything because of the feelings of goodness and positivity arising within him. His

innate drive motivates him to adopt Hassan. Amir has now moved on to the fifth level of hierarchy and all his behaviors would be directed to fulfill those needs.

Amir's needs changed and he craved for sympathy, empathy, and love. Moreover, he also felt the need to be free from remorse and guilt which was constantly haunting him. From this point onwards, all of Amir's behaviors would be directed towards getting rid of those negative feelings of sadness, guilt, betrayal, and remorse. His drives and motivations would make him go in the direction that would help him get rid of such feelings and therefore, help him fulfill his needs. So, Amir's progression towards that positive direction will not only strengthen his positive traits and help in cultivating the innate goodness within him, but will also provide a positive environment for others to follow the same path.

The rest of the events that followed also display Amir's desire to be free from misery and suffering caused by remorse and guilt. Amir went to rescue Sohrab and tasted success in his attempt of adopting and taking him to America. There were many hardships that Amir faced during his venture, but he succeeded in overcoming them. In one such incident in the novel, Amir tried to heal his self-inflicted wounds. Amir, in order to rescue Sohrab, was badly beaten by Assef, the same man who raped Hassan. Instead of retaliating or running for cover, Amir felt that his wounds were being healed and that he was finally getting what he deserved. This clearly happened because of Amir's desire to get free from guilt. This is another example to explain how the psyche and motivation of mind and self can lead to dispositions so bizarre. Amir never stood up for anything in life, but he fought for Hassan's son and also got injured very badly. All this happened when he entered the fifth stage of hierarchy leading to self-actualization.

Instead of retaliating, he laughed after he was beaten black and blue. This attitude may seem bizarre to most, but Amir reacted in this manner because the beating served as a healing to him. The wounds were not new. Suffering at the hands of a person who raped Hassan, from where the whole story started, was kind of a life circle coming back to its full form. Amir understood that and let it happen. There were other events, too, in which Amir stood up for Sohrab and made sure that he came back to America with him. Amir made up his mind to live a life where he could dedicate his energy into making amends for his past actions and providing Hassan's son with the love he was deprived of.

The story of Amir is a perfect example to understand that one's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are affected by the mindset and the perception of the self. The self is created when a person is put into an environment filled with love and respect. When a child is made to feel psychologically secure about his identity, self-image, and esteem, then that child is very easily able to lead a healthy life. Also, the innate goodness of a child manifests and blooms, and helps the child to steer in positive direction. That is what makes a personality positive and good.

Humanists have focused on all these aspects and created theories like Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' theory and Carl Rogers' 'theory of self' to understand why and how needs arise in a person. When the needs of a person are understood, it becomes easy to comprehend and discern the behavior of a person. Amir's life has been a roller coaster. From an ungrateful father who did not accept him the way he was, to the attack on his homeland making him live like a refugee, Amir had seen it all. In this chapter, it has been extensively monitored how Amir's life has been changed for good and how Amir is turned into the man he is at the end of his journey. No two human lives are same, but the principles that govern the human mind are

same for all. An attempt has been made to understand and correlate Amir's external situations to his psyche and dispositions.

The present chapter explores that no matter how complex a person's environment or personal traits may seem, they always relate to one another psychologically. An attempt has been made to study the relevance of psychological theories of Maslow and Rogers.

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